

Diagnostic Ultrasound



- **Please arrive 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment.** If you are late, your appointment may be rescheduled.
- If we must do an emergency ultrasound for someone else, you may have to wait.
- **If you are not able to keep your appointment, please call so that another patient can be booked in your time slot.** Check your appointment letter for the number to call, otherwise call the Diagnostic Imaging Department (at the hospital where you will be having your ultrasound).

Diagnostic Ultrasound

What is an ultrasound?

An ultrasound is a safe, painless test used to view the organs inside your body. It is also called a sonogram. It may be used to view one or more parts of your body, help guide doctors during biopsies (removal of tissue for examination), or check babies during pregnancy.

An ultrasound uses high frequency sound waves that cannot be heard. It does not use X-rays and nothing is injected into your body. Ultrasound does not expose you to radiation.

How does an ultrasound work?

During an ultrasound test, you lie on a stretcher. Gel is placed on the part of your body to be viewed. A hand-held device called a transducer is moved over that part of your body. The transducer sends out sound waves which bounce off tissues inside your body. After the sound waves come into contact with the organs inside your body, they are reflected back to the transducer as echoes.

These echoes make a picture of your organs on a screen. The pictures are saved for a radiologist (a doctor who specializes in diagnostic images) to review.

How do I get ready for the test?

This depends on which organ or area of your body is to be studied.

Upper abdomen (belly)

- **Do not eat or drink after midnight the night before the test.** You may take your pills as usual with a sip of water.
- If you are taking pills and/or insulin for diabetes, check with your family doctor. You may need special instructions if you need to take these medications before your test. Bring your blood testing equipment to the hospital with you on the day of your ultrasound.

Pelvis, kidney, and pregnancy

- Your bladder must be full for this test.
- Please drink 24–32 ounces (3–4 cups) of water 1 hour before your appointment time.
- Do not pass urine (pee) after drinking until your test is over.

Neck, shoulders, arms or legs, breasts, and scrotum

- No preparation is needed if you are having an ultrasound on these areas of your body.

Where is the test done?

All tests, except echocardiograms (heart ultrasounds) and some vascular studies, are done in the Diagnostic Imaging Department (X-ray).

Who will do the test?

A sonographer (a technologist who specializes in ultrasound), sonography student, radiologist, or radiology resident (doctor training to be a radiologist) will do the test. A radiologist will review the results. A report will be sent to the doctor who ordered the test, and to your family doctor.

What will happen during the test?

- Please contact the hospital where you will be having your ultrasound to ask about bringing a support person into the exam room with you.
- You will lie on a stretcher. You will be positioned so the best pictures can be taken.
- A gel will be put on your skin so that there is good contact with the transducer.
- The transducer is then moved across your skin, making a picture on the screen.
- You may be asked to hold your breath or push out your abdomen during the exam.

- The test is usually painless. You may feel a bit of pain if a tender area is being scanned.
- Some procedures need to use an internal transducer. Your sonographer will talk about this with you, if needed.

Pregnancy (obstetrical)

- The sonographer will examine your baby. They must focus during the test, but will answer your questions before or after.
- Each hospital in Nova Scotia has its own policies on:
 - › Support person(s)
 - › Cell phone use
 - › Taking pictures of the baby home
 - › Finding out the gender (sex) of the baby

Depending on the hospital's policies, we may ask family members to stay in the waiting room during the test. These policies are in place to help the sonographer focus and make sure your test is done correctly.

How long will the test take?

- The time depends on the type of test. It may be from 15–60 minutes.
- In twin pregnancies, the test may take up to 1 hour per baby (2 hours in total).
- The sonographer will be glad to answer any questions about your test. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask. We are here to help you.
- **The sonographer will not be able to give you a report right after your exam.** A report will be sent to your family doctor and your doctor will review the results with you.

What are your questions?

Please ask. We are here to help you.

